

Summary: H.R. 2367, the WIPP Extension Act of 2011

HR 2367

- ✿ Will allow WIPP – in addition to its defense mission – to dispose of “non-defense Federal Government-owned Transuranic waste.”
- ✿ Will not allow WIPP to accept waste from the private commercial sector. WIPP will continue to accept only government-owned waste.

Justification

- ✿ The kind of waste that WIPP accepts will not change. H.R. 2367 will allow for non-defense, federally owned waste to be stored at WIPP.
- ✿ Helps clean up transuranic waste in 8 states.
- ✿ Federal agencies (primarily DOE) are sitting on TRU waste that cannot be disposed of because of WIPP’s current restriction on accepting only defense mission waste; it’s posing a significant risk to public health.
- ✿ In keeping with its mission to public health, WIPP’s proven record for the safe handling and disposal of TRU waste makes it the logical choice to receive non-defense mission waste as well.
- ✿ This additional waste stream is expected to keep shipments relatively stable for an additional five to seven years without any impact on the defense mission.
- ✿ WIPP has safely disposed of over 75,500 m³ of TRU waste since 1999 in 9,750 shipments.

Background

- ✿ In 1979 Congress authorized the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) as research and development facility to demonstrate the safe disposal of radioactive waste from defense activities not regulated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).
- ✿ According to DOE, the overall mission of WIPP and the National TRU program is to protect human health and the environment by safe management, retrieval, characterization, and disposal of approved wastes.
- ✿ WIPP predominately accepts contact handled (CH) waste – contact handled waste can be handled under controlled conditions without any shielding beyond the container the waste sits in.
- ✿ WIPP also accepts remote handled (RH) – remote handled waste requires additional safety procedures to properly dispose of the waste. RH waste emits stronger penetrating gamma rays.
- ✿ TRU wastes are man-made, radioactive elements with atomic numbers greater than uranium on the Periodic Table of Elements.
- ✿ TRU wastes consist of clothing, tools, rags, residues, debris, soil and other items contaminated with radioactive elements heavier than uranium, usually plutonium.